

Media Release



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Indigenous Health Organisations call for Budget commitment to close life expectancy gap on National Close the Gap Day

Indigenous health organisations are calling on the Federal Government to back up its commitment to closing the gap in Indigenous life expectancy with commensurate funding in the upcoming Federal Budget.

The call comes on National Close the Gap Day when more than 500 community events will be held across the country, hosted by Australians wanting to raise awareness about the Indigenous health crisis.

It follows the decision by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to sign a nine-point declaration of intent to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders at the Indigenous Health Equality Summit in Canberra on March 20.

Justin Mohamed, deputy chair of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, has welcomed Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's commitment to achieving Indigenous health equality.

"It's an excellent first step, but of course there is much work ahead," Mr Mohamed said.

"The upcoming Federal Budget provides the Government with an opportunity to show just how serious it is about closing the gap in Indigenous life expectancy.

"We are eager to continue working with the Government as it endeavours to tackle Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health inequality. It is crucial that all governments – Federal, State and Territory – work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and peak health bodies if we are to succeed in closing the gap."

The life expectancy of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders is 17 years less than that of other Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women can expect to live to 64.8 years, and men to 59.4 years.

More than 40 organisations launched the Close the Gap health campaign in April 2007. In one year, the campaign has attracted overwhelming public support, with more than 115 000 Australians signing the Close the Gap pledge.

As signatories to the pledge, they support increasing annual Indigenous primary health funding by \$460 million equal access to health services and Indigenous participation in their delivery, and action on social determinants such as housing and education that are leading contributors to the poor health of Indigenous people.

"This is clearly a pivotal moment in time. The overwhelming response to this campaign shows the level of community support for urgent action to address the Indigenous health crisis," said Andrew Hewett, Executive Director of Oxfam Australia.

"We now need to focus on translating that public support and political goodwill into action that actually improves the health of Indigenous Australians."

About Close the Gap:

Close the Gap is Australia's largest ever campaign to improve Indigenous health.

Supported by more than 40 Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations, including Oxfam Australia, the campaign calls on federal, state and territory governments to commit to closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation.

For more information or to interview Justin Mohamed or Andrew Hewett, please contact Sunita Bose, Media Liaison Co-ordinator Oxfam Australia on 0407 555 960